

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 BIB-01 TRSE-00 /080 W
-----092426 282158Z /62
O 281807Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1440
INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 12459

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO SENATOR MCGOVERN'S OFFICE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, UR, US
SUBJECT: ARBATOV'S INFORMAL COMMENTS ON US-SOVIET RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY. DURING A RELAXED LUNCHEON HOSTED BY THE AMBASSADOR AT SPASO HOUSE AUGUST 26, USA INSTITUTE DIRECTOR ARBATOV DISCUSSED US-SOVIET RELATIONS WITH SENATOR MCGOVERN. ARBATOV SAW GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM BUT FELT SEPTEMBER WOULD BE A CRITICAL MONTH FOR THE RELATIONSHIP, GAVE HIS VIEW OF THE FACTORS LEADING TO SOVIET REJECTION OF THE USG'S MARCH SALT PROPOSALS, AND RECALLED THE SOVIET REACTION TO THE US MINING OF NORTH VIETNAMESE WATERS IN 1972. ARBATOV ALSO DESCRIBED SOME CURRENT PROGRAMS BETWEEN HIS INSTITUTE AND THE US COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING SENATOR MCGOVERN'S LATE MORNING MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO AUGUST 26 THE AMBASSADOR HOSTED A SPASO HOUSE LUNCHEON IN THE SENATOR'S HONOR. GUESTS INCLUDED ARBATOV, INSTITUTE DEPUTY DIRECTOR VITALIY ZHURKIN, THE SENATOR'S TWO AIDES, AND FIRST SECRETARY COMBS. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF AN INFORMAL-, TWO-HOUR DISCUSSION OF US-SOVIET RELATIONS.

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3. CURRENT SITUATION. ASKED FOR HIS GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE RELATIONSHIP, ARBATOV AGREED WITH THE SENATOR'S VIEW THAT THE PRESIDENT'S CHARLESTON SPEECH AND BREZHNEV'S TOAST TO TITO MARKED "AN EXCHANGE OF POSITIVE SIGNALS." AS BREZHNEV HAD INDICATED, THE TASK WAS NOW TO TRANSLATE THESE SIGNALS INTO PRACTICAL MEASURES. IN THIS REGARD, SEPTEMBER

WOULD BE A CRITICAL MONTH. ARBATOV FELT IT VERY IMPORTANT FOR THE "PSYCHOLOGICAL ATMOSPHERE" THAT SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS BE DEMONSTRATED ON SALT AT THE FORTHCOMING VIENNA MEETING.

4. PROBLEMS WITH SALT. THE SENATOR NOTED THAT GIVEN THE INDISPUTABLE ABILITY OF OUR TWO COUNTRIES TO DESTROY EACH OTHER MANY TIMES OVER, IT WAS SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND WHY BOTH SIDES REACTED SO VIGOROUSLY TO NEW WEAPONS PROGRAMS IN THE OTHER COUNTRY -- ASSUMING THAT THE LEADERSHIP OF THAT COUNTRY WERE SAME. SURELY NO AMERICAN PRESIDENT WOULD BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE MAJOR US CITIES IN A NUCLEAR EXCHANGE, ANY MORE THAN A SOVIET LEADER WOULD BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE MOSCOW, LENINGRAD AND KIEV. IN THIS LIGHT, IT WAS HARD FOR THE SENATOR TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE SOVIET SIDE REJECTED SO ABRUPTLY THE SALT PROPOSALS SECRETARY VANCE BROUGHT TO MOSCOW LAST MARCH.

5. ARBATOV RESPONDED THAT NEW STEPS IN THE ARMS RACE SOMETIMES GENERATES CRAZY IDEAS AMONG OTHERWISE SANE PEOPLE. HE THEN OUTLINED THE BACKGROUND, AS HE SAW IT, TO THE SOVIET REJECTION OF THE US SALT PROPOSALS LAST MARCH:

-- US-SOVIET RELATIONS BEGAN "TO DETERIORATE" IN 1976, LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE US POLITICAL SITUATION;

-- WITH THE ELECTION OF PRESIDENT CARTER, THE SOVIETS HAD "HIGH HOPES" FOR IMPROVED BILATERAL RELATIONS;
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AVERILL HARRIMAN AND OTHERS CONVEYED POSITIVE SIGNALS FROM PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER, AND THE SOVIET SIDE MADE A GENUINE EFFORT TO RESPOND POSITIVELY;

-- THEN CAME THE SAKHAROV AND BUKOVSKIY INCIDENTS, AND ON THE EVEN OF SECRETARY VANCE'S VISIT THE ADMINISTRATION ALLOCATED INCREASED FUNDS FOR RADIO FREE EUROPE (RFE) AND RADIO LIBERTY (RL);

-- REGARDING THE SALT PROPOSALS THEMSELVES, "SERIOUS PEOPLE" ON THE SOVIET SIDE THOUGHT DURING THE VANCE VISIT THAT THE SECRETARY MUST HAVE BROUGHT SOMETHING MORE; THE SOVIET SIDE HAD INFORMED THE USG PRIOR TO VANCE'S ARRIVAL THAT ITS FALL-BACK POSITION WAS UNACCEPTABLE; THE CHIEF PROBLEM WITH THE US "DEEP-CUT" PROPOSAL WAS THAT THE SOVIET BUREAUCRACY FOCUSED ON THE NUMBERS AND LOST SIGHT OF THE UNDERLYING CONCEPTS;

-- IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH BETTER TO DISCUSS THE FIRST US PROPOSAL THOROUGHLY, AND QUIETLY, PRIOR TO GIVING IT WORLD-WIDE PUBLICITY.

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SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 BIB-01 TRSE-00 /080 W
-----092625 282158Z /73

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6. CRUISE MISSILES AND THE NEUTRON BOMB. HISTORICALLY, ARBATOV CONTINUED, THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE OF US-SOVIET RELATIONS AFFECTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY WEAPONRY ON BOTH SIDES. GIVEN THE PRESENT, RELATIVELY BAD POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE, HOWEVER, RECENT USG ACTIONS ON CRUISE MISSILES AND THE NEUTRON BOMB HAD A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.

7. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT IN GENERAL HE AGREED WITH ARBATOV'S POINT ABOUT THE DESIRABILITY OF THOROUGH BILATERAL DISCUSSION OF COMPLEX ISSUES. BUT, AS HE HAD TOLD ARBATOV ON AN EARLIER OCCASION, THE SOVIET SIDE HAD CERTAINLY NOT OBSERVED THIS PRINCIPLE WITH REGARD TO THE RECENT, SOVIET INSPIRED CAMPAIGN ON THE NEUTRON BOMB. ARBATOV SAID THAT WHILE HE DID NOT WANT TO ARGUE THE POINT, HE DID FEEL THAT THE NEUTRON BOMB PRESENTED A PROBLEM FOR TWO SPECIFIC REASONS: IT COULD LOWER THE NUCLEAR THRESHOLD, AND IT COULD LEAD TO ENHANCED DANGER OF NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION.

8. RADIOS AND CAPTIVE NATIONS. ARBATOV NOTED THAT "REMNANTS OF THE COLD WAR," SUCH AS RL, RFE AND "CAPTIVE NATIONS WEEK," SHOULD BE ABOLISHED. ARBATOV ACKNOWLEDGED THAT RL WAS HEAVILY JAMMED; HE CLAIMED ITS LISTENERSHIP WAS "MINISCULE," BUT HE SAID ITS SUBSTANCE CLEARLY WAS "SUBVERSIVE." THE YEARLY
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PROCLAMATION OF "CAPTIVE NATIONS WEEK" WAS EQUALLY REPUGNANT. IN RESPONSE TO THE SENATOR'S QUESTION, ARBATOV SAID THE VOA, AS THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE USG, WAS NOT COMPARABLE TO RL AND RFE. THE SOVIET SIDE DID NOT ALWAYS APPRECIATE THE CONTENT OF VOA BROADCASTING TO THE USSR, BUT COULD OF COURSE RAISE THIS OFFICIALLY WITH THE USG. RL AND RFE BEGAN AS "COLD WAR INSTRUMENTS," CLOAKED AS INDEPENDENT ENTITIES. THEY HAD CHANGED LITTLE OVER THE YEARS, AND SHOULD BE ABOLISHED.

9. THE 1972 SUMMIT AND VIETNAM. ASKED BY THE SENATOR ABOUT THE DIFFICULT SOVIET DECISION TO PROCEED WITH THE 1972 SUMMIT, ARBATOV MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

-- ONE OF THE MAIN DIFFICULTIES FOR US-SOVIET RELATIONS, WHICH STEMMED FROM THE US MINING OF DRV PORTS, WAS THAT "SOME PEOPLE" IN THE SOVIET UNION ARGUED THAT THE TRUE NATURE OF US IMPERIALISM WAS NOW FULLY REVEALED;

-- NONETHELESS, "THE FEELING" WAS THAT SOVIET RESTRAINT VIS A VIS THE US WOULD IN THE END BE BETTER FOR THE VIETNAMESE THAN WOULD A HARD LINE;

-- "NO ONE" THOUGHT THE MINING WOULD SERIOUSLY HARM THE MILITARY POSITION OF THE DRV; INDEED, THE US DECISION TO MINE DRV PORTS WAS INTERPRETED IN MOSCOW PRIMARILY AS AN ACT OF POLITICAL DESPERATION, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 1972 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.

10. THE USA INSTITUTE. ARBATOV SAID HE WAS PROUD THAT AMONG HIS STAFF OF ABOUT 150 SCHOLARS SOME 20 HAD BECOME "TRUE EXPERTS," WITH A FEEL FOR US DEVELOPMENTS AS WELL AS A THOROUGH GRASP OF THE FACTS. HE SAID THAT THE INSTITUTE'S CONFIDENTIAL

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RECORD OF CORRECT PREDICTIONS WAS PARTICULARLY GOOD DURING THE PAST 12 MONTHS. ARBATOV AND ZHURKIN NOTED THAT THE INSTITUTE RECENTLY

HAD DEVELOPED TWO PROGRAMS WITH THE US COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS: ONE INVOLVED THE COUNCIL'S "1980'S PROJECT," THE OTHER WAS A STUDY OF US AND SOVIET CONCEPTIONS OF DETENTE.

11. THIS CABLE HAS BEEN CLEARED BY SENATOR MCGOVERN IN SUBSTANCE.

12. DEPARTMENT REPEAT AS DESIRED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, MEETING REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MOSCOW12459
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770311-0183
Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770815/aaaaalxo.tel
Line Count: 221
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1456991
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ARBATOV'S INFORMAL COMMENTS ON US-SOVIET RELATIONS
TAGS: PARM, UR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9ed3df51-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009